PERSPECTIVES ON THE HIDDEN CURRICULUM WITHIN THE SOCIAL STUDIES

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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Background

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) defines social studies as “the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence” (2012, http://www.socialstudies.org/about). Furthermore, NCSS proclaims that social studies educators “teach students the content knowledge, intellectual skills, and civic values necessary for fulfilling the duties of citizenship in a participatory democracy” (NCSS, 2010, http://www.socialstudies.org/about). These are the stated goals the NCSS has declared and sets out to accomplish. But do social studies teachers do this? Perhaps of more importance, do social studies students learn this? What NCSS fails to acknowledge, at least publicly, is a question Henry Giroux and Anthony Penna posed, quite sensibly, in their article concerning the dynamics of the hidden curriculum: “What is learned in school?” (Giroux, 1979, p. 23). This laconic question is revised to fit this study more directly: What do students learn in social studies classrooms?

Most teachers and administrators would like to believe that much is taught, perhaps even as much as NCSS states as its objective. But what is being taught? Is it content knowledge? Intellectual skills? Or the civic values necessary for fulfilling the duties of citizenship in a participatory democracy? The exact combination and effectiveness of time and effort to these three objectives within each social studies classroom certainly varies from one to the other. Nonetheless, historically, content knowledge has almost always seemed to be the focus of social studies courses (Goodlad,
But whatever the case, “the gap between what is taught and what is learned—both intended and unintended—is large” (Gibson, 2012, p. 44). This complication may seem discouraging to both NCSS and well-intentioned social studies teachers across the world. Yet, nearly everything is learned in schools, but which the educators did not intend to teach. That is, the lessons, names, dates, and facts are almost certainly to be forgotten by the students at some point in time, if ever learned and retained in the first place. However, the hidden curriculum – which consists of those things students learn through the experience of attending school rather than the stated educational objectives of such institutions (Haralambos, 1991, p. 1) – reveals that what is learned in schools, despite the explicit curriculum, has a profound impact on the way students behave inside the classroom and inside the school arena; and amongst family and friends and peers and strangers; and at home and in society.

Statement of the Problem

Social studies teachers are challenged with teaching a vast amount of information crossing multiple subjects—American and world history, economics, psychology, anthropology, sociology, political science, government, and geography (Engle, 2003, p. 7)—during a typical school year of 180 days. In addition to the time restraints and expansive curriculum, social studies teachers must also teach multiple perspectives on each topic; a failure to do so will result in inaccurate and biased manipulation. Furthermore, the state and school board-mandated social studies curriculum provides loose regulation of what material social studies teachers teach. Despite these complications and limitations, effective social studies teachers are well aware of these
and adapt to the circumstances. But it is time to assess how these complications and limitations affect and result in student learning and understanding of the subject.

**Definition of Terms**

Hidden Curriculum: “The hidden curriculum consists of those things pupils learn through the experience of attending school rather than the stated educational objectives of such institutions” (Dickerson, 2007, p. 14).

Explicit Curriculum: “The curriculum conveyed through the curriculum guides prepared for teachers, the array of courses offered by the schools, the topics listed for these courses, the tests given, the teaching materials used, teachers’ statements of what they are trying to teach their students or have them learn, and the like” (Goodlad, 1984, p. 197).


**Research Questions**

1. What do social studies teachers teach?
2. What do students learn in social studies classrooms?
3. Do students retain more knowledge from the explicit or hidden curriculum?
4. Why is social studies a required class?

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the Master’s Research Project was to examine and analyze the perspectives of students, teachers, and administrators at a rural school in southeastern Ohio regarding what teachers intend to teach and what students actually learn in the social studies classroom. The purpose of the literature review was to evaluate whether the findings in published research studies regarding the hidden curriculum by educational
scholars are similar to those discovered in this study.

Methodology

The methods performed for this study included interview consent forms distributed to classes at a school in rural southeastern Ohio taught by a tenth grade American Studies teacher, an American Government teacher, a ninth grade American Studies teacher, a ninth grade Humanities teacher, and an Intervention Specialist who specializes in the social studies. Of the 96 students enrolled in those five combined classes, 21 returned the parental consent forms required for participation in this study. Of those 21 students who were eligible for the study, I randomly sampled two students from each of the five classes for further participation in an interview.

All forms of participation were done so by informed consent, and no real names and identities are disclosed; rather, names are changed and therefore the participants remain anonymous. The academic literature selected, reviewed, and analyzed for this Master’s Research Project was found through Internet searches including Ohio University Library’s ArticlePlus, Alice Catalog, Google Scholar, Academic Search Complete, ERIC, and EBSCO. Key terms such as “social studies”; “curriculum”; “perspectives”; “hidden curriculum”; “implicit curriculum”; “the new social studies”; “education”; were all used in order to generate the literature references.

Limitations

This study was limited to students and teachers at a high school located in rural southeastern Ohio. Thus, this study only reflects the perspectives at the school in this study. The high school in which the study was conducted was chosen because of the
author’s access to the school, the teachers working there, and the students enrolled at that school.

Overview

The objective of this Master’s Research Project was to obtain and analyze answers to the above research questions regarding perspectives on the hidden curriculum within the social studies. This involved an analysis of the existing research literature on the hidden curriculum and the findings in this study. Based on an analysis of this data, recommendations will be made with regard to the hidden curriculum within the social studies. In order to better understand the basis and rationale for the development of this Master’s Research Project, Chapter Two will present a review of the research literature.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents a review and analysis of existing literature and research relevant to the hidden curriculum within the social studies. This chapter is subdivided into sections focused on the following topics: 1) the importance of the hidden curriculum; 2) the two levels of the hidden curriculum; 3) the structure of level one and its effects; 4) the structure of level two and its effects; 5) a brief historiography of the hidden curriculum; and a 6) summary.

The Importance of the Hidden Curriculum

Whether acknowledged or neglected by educators, the hidden curriculum is present in every school in the United States. It is present in some schools more than others and in some classes more than that of others. Nonetheless, “the hidden curriculum is responsible for as much as 90 percent of all learning taking place in school” (Massialas, 249). Therefore, an understanding the hidden curriculum – consisting “of those things pupils learn through the experience of attending school rather than the stated educational objectives of such institutions” (Dickerson, 2007) – is essential to ensure that the hidden curriculum is maximized to the student-body and one needs to understand how it functions within a school setting and among those within it, most notably – but not limited to – the surrounding community, parents, administrators, teachers, custodians, secretaries, nurses, counselors, coaches, and students.

Two Levels

According to Posner (1987) there are two levels to the hidden curriculum. One of
those levels is the structure of values within the school and the classroom. Within the school at-large, this structure of values is inherent in the disciplinary measures of the administration, the school’s stated goals, the communication between the school and the community, and the daily schedule of bells and class period length (Kern, 2007).

Structure is also subliminally inherent within classrooms in the location and arrangement of desks and explicitly inherent by the teacher’s disposition and stated classroom rules, guidelines and goals, the classroom atmosphere of interaction, and the teacher’s usual methods of assessment (Posner, 84).

The second level of the hidden curriculum is the actual structure of the explicit curriculum. That is, the specific curriculum separated and mandated for each class, such as the arrangement of subjects like social studies, science and English, the difference in students’ age and cultures each of these classes includes, and how teachers decide to teach their subjects and lessons (Kern, 2007). An example of these curricular structures is an eleventh-grade economics teacher focusing on capitalist qualities over non-monetary economies present in barter systems or communist or socialist economies. In addition, this teacher regularly chooses to teach material with videos rather than lectures and assesses student progress with small quizzes and big projects rather than unit tests (Posner, 84).

Level One. The first level of the hidden curriculum concerns the values and disciplinary measures which the school claims; however, the most significant impact concerns how those values affect students and how disciplinary measures are implemented and enforced by school teachers and administrators (Kern, 2007) – in turn affecting student values. Most social studies teachers in the United States would claim
that “democratic values” are an important concept in their classroom. However, these “democratic values” are often heard but not entirely understood. That is, teachers should teach democratic values so that students become active citizens in a participatory democracy; yet, some contradict this dogma, arguing “American schools do not and cannot teach democratic values” (Martinson, p. 132).

In other words, an authoritarian school setting prohibits democratic thinking by restricting student freedom. For example, students must ask to use the restroom, dress in certain manner, raise their hands to speak, limit their speech to the teacher and principal’s rules, and follow school rules as well as rules within each separate classroom. As Erikson, Luttbeg, and Tedin theorize, “there is an all too obvious disjuncture between democratic creed and what actually goes on in school…[which] tends to inhibit political learning” (Erikson, Luttbeg, and Tedin, p. 149). As Ratna Ghosh (2008) claims, “the school is a microcosm of society,” (p. 27) which, if her theory is accurate, helps to explain low voter turnouts in local, state, and national elections due to the lack of participation and decision-making in schools (Martinson, p. 133).

This strict structure of academic values is wrested in tradition even though many administrators and teachers acknowledge the ever-changing world of today (Holcomb, 2011). Moreover, this same structure of values is still present in the ‘new’ age of globalization and teaching students to have a “global perspective” so that they “analyze issues in the world and society critically and to participate actively in problem solving and decision making for change” (White, 2002, p. 262). Or, perhaps this structure of values is more about the lack of these values. As Hope (1996) explains about the traditional rules and teaching style of direct instruction, “the question is whether this
traditional arrangement is helping to develop students who can think for themselves and participate as responsible citizens in a changing world” (p.150). Whatever the case, many people, especially young people, do not understand – or perhaps do not believe in – their own importance in a seemingly large yet continuously connected world.

Level Two. The second level of the hidden curriculum concerns more what occurs inside the actual classroom environment rather than at level one’s concern with the school rules and culture within a society. In American public schools, subjects are separated into different classes where only that subject’s teacher teaches his or her subject as determined by state and national standards. In addition, those students being taught all fall within a similar age range by grade level. These first few structures are nearly ubiquitous within schools across the United States – with some exceptions such as home schools and Montessori schools. However, not every country’s school system structures this part of the hidden curriculum in this way.

In Shanghai, China, “the new Morals and Society curriculum guide…differs very much from the old Social Studies curriculum guide in that it is no longer organized along modules that are theme based” (Tin-Yau Lo, 2012, p. 80). Rather, it is “clearly organized by the strands that follow the expanding communities stretching from the student as a member of a family, the school, the local community, the hometown…the motherland, and the global village” (Tin-Yau Lo, 2012, p. 80). In this sense, young students begin by understanding their place and role within the family context first; only after this understanding does the student advance to the bigger picture of the school, community, city, country, and world. This curriculum structure resembles Paul Hanna’s “Expanding Communities of Social Reality” theory, which Australia has increasingly adopted while
“reforms in the social studies over the past decade have largely led to its demise in the United States” (Parry, 1990, p. 47). While arguing for its demise, however, Frazee and Ayers (2003) argue that Hanna’s expanding communities model is alive and well in the United States.

Perhaps American students who feel their participation in United States politics is insignificant – since they do not use their voting power – fail to understand their significance due to Hanna’s constraining developmental model. This new ‘global world’ may overwhelm or discourage young people from participation in a democratic government because they feel smaller and smaller when they should instead feel bigger and bigger after understanding their familial, school, and local importance first. However, the contents of Shanghai’s school subjects are “still bound by the existence of a parallel-disciplined mode in which the traditional disciplinary boundaries” of subjects are visibly divided (Tin-Yau Lo, 2012, p. 81).

In Hong Kong, China, this boundary is made less visible in the General Studies by integrating “knowledge related to personal, social, and humanities education; science education; and technology education” and providing “more room for interdisciplinary issues-based inquiry” and accommodating “interdisciplinary issues or problem-based inquiry that is critical, authentic, hands-on, and multiperspectival” (Tin-Yau Lo, 2012, p. 81). These systems are much different than most American school systems, but “presently, social studies classrooms reflect little meaningful integration” of these aspects, especially advanced technology (White, 2002, p. 264). Although important, the most significant aspect is not the school system itself, but rather how teachers carry out the curriculum.
Social studies is complicated by the issue of who is telling the story – or understanding different perspectives on the same topic of study, such as the conflicting perspective, and thus different story, of United States military and that of Japanese civilians during the atomic bomb droppings in 1945 (Doppen, 2000). As one high school social studies teacher opined, most social studies “textbooks portray the dominant narrative of those who hold power in society,” and, therefore, he “intentionally incorporated multiple competing perspectives of historical events” into his self-constructed reading packets in order to tell the whole story and offer multiple perspectives, such as “non-white peoples, woman, gays and lesbians, immigrants/migrants, and the poor and working classes,” among others (Martell, 2001, p. 3). Unlike math or science, in social studies there are no clear-cut answers; rather, there are understandings and interpretations. Sometimes these interpretations are skewed or misinterpreted, sometimes intentionally and at times unintentionally. Because the United States is a democratic society, schools should function in a similar manner. However, McKnight and Chandler (2009) argue, “instead of a tapestry of diverse voices seeking solutions through alternative discourses…such dependence on” a factual-driven democracy problematizes the teaching and learning of social studies (p. 69).

There are both similar and competing theories behind the reasons for these power structures that determine the content of each subject, including social studies. But as De Lissovoy (2011) argues, “macropolitical effects” have led to “the intimate terrain of subject production;” that is, the white majority’s population advantage over that of the minorities in America largely discounts the minority’s perspectives, which hinders the educational experience of minorities in favor of the white majority. Furthermore, Saxe
(1996) points to the importance of textbooks and how many textbook publishers purposively portray historical events as ‘the mainstream’. Agarwal’s (2001) research indicates “disparities among racial, cultural, and linguistic groups in school achievement continue to be matters of increased national importance, prompting concerns to educational equity in U.S. public schools” because the population is growing more diverse every decade” (p. 52).

Even as social studies teachers continue to adopt the approach of teaching students multiple perspectives and to be proactive by helping them learn how to think critically and make logical decisions, “more and more we have adjusted to a culture dominated by expert opinion while our confidence in our own abilities to make complex social judgments continues to erode … life appears so complex that the average person abandons political action for personal development [and] citizenship is reduced to surviving, following rules, and occasionally voting” (Stanley & Whitson, 1993, p. 58). This paradox has and does restrict many education systems’ goals. Furthermore, many history and social studies textbooks are mainly designed to “instill patriotism or to create good citizens, without defining what a good citizen is, or without broadening this notion to do something other than voting” (McKnight & Chandler, 2009, p. 71).

The final structure of the second level of the hidden curriculum concerns how teachers teach the subject they study – or each teacher’s ‘teaching style.’ Teachers’ teaching styles often vary from each other and have many underlying influences that affect his or her teaching style. One of those influences is the standards and pedagogy required by the local and state education system, such as high-stakes testing focused on content knowledge rather than citizenship skills (Misco, Patterson, & Doppen, 2011).
Moreover, these standards have diminished many students’ perceptions of the importance of social studies due to a contemporary focus on literacy, science, and mathematics, and as a result have not “addressed social studies goals or the civic mission of schools” (McGuire, 2000, p. 621). Gibson’s (2011) research revealed “that social studies is often the least liked course that children and youth take in school and the one that they feel most lacks relevance to their lives” (p. 43). Nonetheless, “it’s not [about] the content; it’s how it’s delivered” that matters most (p. 48).

As the research indicates, “social studies teachers often present global cultures and people as if they were entirely distant and disconnected from the fate of students as citizens of their local community” (Maguth, 2011, p. 27). Therefore, some teachers emphasize a place-based education that utilizes the local community and resources to “learn through real world experiences and authentic interaction with other local citizens” (Maguth, 2011, p. 27). Still, others emphasize decision-making and citizenship skills over a strict content-only curriculum because if content coverage is the main objective, students “may…arrive at totally erroneous conclusions” (Engle, 2003, p. 8). Others advocate for different styles of teaching by focusing on relating content to students, delivering enthusiastic lectures, engaging student in active lessons, and model project-based styles, including involving student-collaboration. Nonetheless, research findings suggest that these teaching styles d “not work without adjusting the process to the prevailing social-political context of the school and the emotional stage of the students and teachers (Massialias, 2009, p. 247). Furthermore, the “hidden curriculum [is] indeed operative” and “without considering its efforts, efforts at reform in the social studies classroom were bound to fail (Massialias, 2009, p. 247). In other words, the hidden social
studies curriculum must first be accurately identified and meaningfully applied to the
learning objectives of the school in order to best educate students (Saxe, 1996).

A Brief Historiography

There is no known or possible way to eliminate the hidden curriculum, no matter
where and how it functions or operates. However, it can be maximized for students by
understanding how society outside of the school and classroom operates. For example, it
would be difficult, or irrelevant, for an American History professor to teach democratic
ideals in a school located in a communist society as it would have no relevance to his or
her students’ lives. Likewise, students may not understand the relevance of a totalitarian
teacher attempting to teach how to manipulate, exploit, and control people within a
democratic society. These are certainly extreme examples, but the point needs to be
understood nonetheless.

Posner’s research reveals that most teachers conduct classrooms in which content
is more important than process, as content is perceived as objective and convergent
thinking preferable to divergent thinking. Education is knowing the answers to pre-
determined questions, and authority has the answers to these questions (Posner, 1987). In
other words, teachers teach the same annual material that is most prevalent in the larger
society outside the classroom regardless of the omitted material that students could or
should be learning to become well educated citizens and independent thinkers and
problem solvers.

Giroux and Penna (1979) further explain this phenomenon:

Once the relationship between schooling and the larger society is recognized,
questions about the nature and meaning of the schooling experience can be
viewed from a theoretical perspective capable of illuminating the often-ignored relationship between school knowledge and social control. By viewing schools within the context of the larger society, social studies developers can begin to focus on the tacit teaching that goes on in schools and help to uncover the ideological messages embedded in both the content of the formal curriculum and the social relations of the classroom encounter.

In an attempt to complete the hidden curriculum spectrum and as a direct response to Giroux and Penna (1979), Cornbleth (1980) argues that, “Pluralism is an important feature of democratic society …While pluralism has observable manifestations, it is an essentially intangible phenomenon,” (p. 58) encompassing both the existence and the recognition of the legitimacy of human diversity, of different ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving.

Summary

This chapter discussed the research literature on the hidden curriculum in schools and within the social studies classroom. It suggests that people of authority at the macro-level, such as state curriculum coordinators, often misunderstand the hidden curriculum and underestimate its influence at the micro-level in the school and social studies classroom. Because the hidden curriculum constitutes a significant component of the educational experience of many students, this Master’s Research Project sought to assess its impact in a local school in rural Southeast Ohio.
CHAPTER THREE
METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the perspectives of administrators, social studies teachers, and social studies students on the hidden curriculum and its impact on the learning process. The literature review discussed the importance of acknowledging the hidden curriculum in the school and classroom settings and contained a brief historiography. Data for this Master’s Research Project was collected by distributing consent forms to administrators, social studies teachers, and social studies students. These forms were then signed by the appropriate signee and collected. Subsequently I selected several students for interviews via random sampling by class. The findings of this study will add to the research on the hidden curriculum and more specifically the perspectives on the hidden curriculum within the social studies.

Participants

This study took place at a high school in rural southeastern Ohio. The high school serves a rural population of several townships. The consent forms were distributed to five social studies teachers and students enrolled in grade 9-12 social studies classes. Of the 96 consent forms distributed to students, 21 were returned. Five social studies teachers agreed to participate in a taped interview. In addition, two administrators were interviewed due to their importance and positions held. Finally, ten students from the five social studies classes were randomly sampled to participate in this study.

Both administrators were men from rural regions in the state of Ohio. Four teachers were males and one was female. Three teachers were from the area where the
school is located, one was from a different state but a similar rural area, and the other is from a suburban area in a different part of the state. Of the students, eight were male, two were female; two were seniors, five juniors, two sophomores, and one was a freshman.

Data Collection

Each administrator, teacher, and randomly selected student who participated in this study was audio taped during an interview with questions regarding the goals of social studies, purposes for studying the social studies, opinions on the social studies curriculum, how their current social studies class functioned on a daily basis, a brief explanation of the current content being studied in their social studies class, and their interpretation of the hidden curriculum within the social studies after having been read the definition of the hidden curriculum provided in this study (see Chapter 1). Each question was open-ended with several asking the participant to “explain why” in order to provide a full response.

Data Analysis

Due to the small number of participants, data analysis did not require any software application. Thoughtful observation and accurate interpretation was my main method of analysis throughout this study. This involved comparing and contrasting responses to the same or similar questions in order to differentiate and categorize correlating perspectives on the hidden curriculum with the social studies. Chapter Four will present the findings.
CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

In order to understand the hidden curriculum, particularly within the social studies, further study of what social studies teachers teach, what their students learn, and the importance of the subject is needed due to the complexities and intricacies within the hidden curriculum. The following four sections will focus on those four research questions listed in Chapter One. All participants have been assigned pseudonyms.

Bob has been an American Studies, American Government, and Geography teacher for over twenty years in this school district. Tom is a special interventionist with a background and focus in the social studies and he aids students with exceptional needs in their social studies classes. He has been teaching and aiding in social studies for over 20 years. Don is an American Law and American Government teacher who has been teaching for 3 years. Layne is a first year teacher who teaches English Language Arts in addition to social studies. Burt is an American Studies, Psychology, and American Government teacher who has been teaching in the district for over 15 years. Jim has been an administrator for over 10 years and has previous experience in teaching social studies and other administrative positions. Steve has been an administrator for three years and has teaching experience in both social studies and English Language Arts. Marshall and Fred are freshman; Ryan, Manny, and Cory are sophomores; Ray and Pete are juniors; Wesley, Kendra, and Emily are seniors. All students are enrolled in and attend social studies classes at this high school.
1. What do social studies teachers teach?

As part of the interview the student, teacher, and administrator participants were asked several questions about what social studies teachers teach. Burt acknowledged that he does not “just teach names, facts, and dates” and that he usually has students look “at history through multiple aspects” using “picture analysis” in which he and his students study and analyze photographs from different historical time periods, which helps students understand how people lived during different eras and in different places. He also employs different forms of roleplaying and simulations such as the “immigration simulation that goes into a lot of detail” and simulates students “going through Ellis Island.” Another lesson he noted was the Kent State shooting in which students simulate the “viewpoint of the students…and the police, the governor, the national guardsmen.” He described these lessons as being “engaging” and that it “allows kids to look at issues and not just jump on the bandwagon and decide if it was right or wrong, but to look at it and determine how different people may have viewed” each case during the incident. Jim expanded on this teaching style, stating that “the kids are engaged with a lot of big ideas” rather than straight content material.

Furthermore, several teachers mentioned the use of discussion activities during their classes in which students have the ability to develop their own opinions and debate them with not only other students but the teachers as well. Burt noted that he encourages students to “take a stand on issues” because “if you’re doing good social studies teaching, you’re always pushing the envelope a little bit.” He uses “four corners activities” dedicated to “examine issues” by labeling each corner of the room ranging from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘strongly agree’. Next he announces a current issue and the students move to
whichever corner best represents their opinion and then discuss it amongst themselves before the teacher opens up the room for debate between the four ‘corners.’ Added Jim, “the teaching...is really good because we expose a lot of different ideas to debate and we do a good thing with engaging kids” in the learning process. Similarly, Bob stated that he tries to “inspire students with the love of history and an understanding of government and how it functions” by “discuss[ing] important events in our recent history.”

Furthermore, Burt, Don, Layne, and Jim advocated the use of Howard Zinn’s *A People’s History of the United States*, which tells the story of American history from a counterculture perspective not usually found in traditional textbooks. Don said of Zinn, “I teach it whenever I get the option.” He added, “I start the year off with Christopher Columbus and I use the Zinn stuff. It’s not in the curriculum, but I do it anyway and the kids are blown away. It’s a great way to establish what kind of class this is going to be.” Similarly, another teacher praised Zinn because it “gives a better depiction of history than we typically think and read about in our textbooks.” Jim offered more of the same about Zinn, “We try some of that…but probably not enough.”

The social studies teachers and administrators at this school praised the flexibility of the explicit social studies curriculum, mainly because the administration and “the staff wrote it.” Jim added, “Our teachers worked really hard on an engaging curriculum.” Explained Burt in detail, “we cover a pretty broad spectrum...we begin by studying ancient cultures in middle school, then we focus primarily on American History at the high school level, as well as psychology, geography, and domestic and foreign government.” Said Steve, our teachers “come up with engaging lessons that get kids fired
up about learning” in order “to keep abreast of what’s going on in today’s world.” In fact, Burt explained that the teachers are always refining the social studies curriculum and it occurs rather often. It is especially helpful that they “get a little bit of feedback from the kids” to improve it every year to make it relevant to them.

Despite the teachers’ and administrators’ praise for the explicit social studies curriculum, they also mentioned that it has its cons. A common theme among both teachers and administrators is the large amount of content required to teach in relation to the time they have to teach it. For example, Don wished “there weren’t as much stuff as I have to cover as I do…there is too much…I came up short this year…I need a couple more weeks” in order to cover it all. Added Jim, “I think we’re always pressing time and part of that is accelerated by…the state standards and the [Ohio Graduation] Tests.”

Asked what he would want to change about the curriculum, he responded, “I would want to change the state requirements and I would like to then not have to cover everything, or as much” because some of the topics are irrelevant today. For example, “we try to cover some stuff that are on the OGT test that I don’t think is all that important, but we have to get to it, so there’s still too much stuff in it…it’s driven by an outside source.” He mentioned the Boxer Rebellion being just one of the many common topics whose significance to students’ education he could not find meaningful.

The OGT tests were not only mentioned by the administrators but by teachers as well. Bob explained that “with the state standards and OGT…that teachers are being forced to implement” and are “teaching the test to the students.” He added, “The OGTs and the state assessments force a lot on the teachers” but he and other social studies teachers are “teaching a variety of other academic skills” such as reading and writing in
order to help students perform better on these standardized tests. Steve noted that “there is a lot of factual stuff that kids need to learn when you’re talking about standards and you have got to be real careful in social studies that you’re not trying to cover such a broad range of things.” Further explaining this concept, he said that “could be the one problem area of the curriculum.” In order to fix it, “We try to cover a smaller range but cover those [concepts] more deeply.” Despite these concerns, Steve explained that, “I don’t think that will affect us too much because our teachers do a really nice job of taking those standards and kind of fitting them toward what we do best here,” which is engaging students in “projects and hands-on stuff.”

When asked if there was anything they wished they could change in the curriculum—other than eliminating or revising the state standards—only three adult participants expressed any desire to change it. Burt added that he would do a more thorough “overview of communism” and “to look at how economics affects politics, and how economics affects life events.” He explained how the Great Depression ultimately and indirectly led to fascism rising in Europe as one example. He said, “I think those questions are very interesting concepts for the kids to look at, and I think we have some work to do in that area.”

Layne noted that she “would change the one unit specifically on Christianity and Islam because I think that is misrepresents those two religions and kind of pins them against each other.” Jim expressed his desire for the biggest change, saying “I’ve always thought history ought to be nomothetic, and that is you ought to take what current issues and trace them backwards, but I think that’s very complex and really difficult and requires a whole different set of materials that you normally can’t find.”
When asked, ‘What does your social studies teacher teach?’ students’ responses were similar to those of teachers. For example, five of the ten students interviewed acknowledged that what they usually learn in their social studies class is content. Although each student answered it slightly different, Fred expressed the overall message of the students interviewed, saying, “My social studies teacher mainly teaches content but he uses projects and activities to further explain the content.” In addition, seven of the students mentioned that they regularly work on projects. Two of these students described them as “fun.” Three mentioned studying and analyzing current events as a regular activity and all ten students mentioned or explained discussions being a central part of their social studies classes.

2. What do students learn in social studies classrooms?

As part of the interview the student, teacher, and administrator participants were asked several questions about what students learn in their social studies class. Despite every teacher mentioning “content” when asked what they teach and five of ten students acknowledging that content is one of their teacher’s top priorities, one teacher admitted that the students “don’t really remember the content really well.” However, all ten students mentioned discussions or debates as a common aspect of their learning. Steve explained that teachers teach students more than content. For example, students “learn and know strategies,” with the help from their teachers, to “best help [them] learn.” That is, students interacting with other students by engaging “them in a learning activity” so you can “get immediate feedback from students.” Moreover, Tom believes “engaged kids speaking…in the classroom is the key to your successes.”
Steve and Jim explained that discussions are a significant, common learning strategy utilized by social studies teachers in this school because they engage students in the learning. Said Tom, “getting [students] actively involved as speakers and participate in speaking activities…they will learn those skills as well.” In fact, Steve added that he hopes students are “learning things like civil discourse” in order to be able to openly discuss current events and to “formulate opinions based on research and facts.” In addition, after stating that his first priority is “covering the content I am supposed to cover,” Bob explained the importance of students understanding how to discuss and debate topics with one another in a classroom setting. He expects his students to be “respectful of others, being open-minded, [and] not making fun of other kids’ opinions.” Most students seemed to understand this concept, as one student shared that “I have no right to criticize you” over certain beliefs.

In order for students to formulate their own opinions during discussions, Tom shared that he teaches students to learn how to “research content and the materials you want the students to know.” Because discussions are largely student-centered learning strategies, teachers must help students find the facts on issues, so students learn how to “research and document that research through citing their sources correctly” in order to find valid and reliable information. Steve added, “There is a lot of factual stuff that kids need to learn when you’re talking about standards and you have got to be real careful…that you’re not trying to cover such a broad range of things.” He further explained that teachers prepare for these discussions and that “we kind of center a lot of our curriculum around a central set of questions” in order to “cover a smaller range [of topics] but cover those [topics] more deeply.”
Furthermore, teachers must facilitate and direct students to stay on one topic and learn as much about that topic as possible. Said Tom about discussions, “everybody has an open forum” and “we need to learn tolerance and everybody should express how they feel within the proper frameworks of a classroom without offending people or getting out of control.” He added, “every human being – or every person in the United States has that First Amendment right, freedom of speech” and that he does not “limit other people’s freedom of speech, even if they don’t agree with my philosophy.”

Although teachers and administrators advocate students to regularly share their opinions and beliefs during discussions, they were divided about whether teachers should share their personal beliefs, political affiliation, religion, and opinions during discussions. Said Jim, “I don’t think they should” because “kids are so impressionable, even all the way up to their senior year, that you have to be really careful…about how you present certain topics and how to discuss things.” Added Burt, “I don’t believe they [teachers] should” share their personal beliefs because doing so may “sway students’ thinking politically, whether it’s a local issue or a national election issue.” However, he also mentioned “I don’t think it’s extremely damaging that it [his beliefs] come out if it’s handled properly.”

Other social studies teachers disagree. Layne added “I think that teachers should share some of their beliefs with their students if they expect their students to do the same for them.” Yet another teacher, Tom, “I have no problem expressing my views and philosophies” with students. Two other teachers explained that they have changed their stance on this issue over the last few years. Don shared that “this is something that I’ve grappled with extensively over the last two years.” He explained further, “I used to be
like, ‘no teachers are strictly apolitical when they’re in their classroom and can never [share their personal beliefs] because that’s indoctrination. But that’s not true.” He rationalized this by stating, “it’s disrespectful for me to think that if somebody asks my opinion and I give it that they’re instantly going to change their minds, because they don’t.” He added, “We want them [the students] to ask questions, we want them to be…looking for the answers…so I give them my opinion if they ask for it” because “it’s like denying them a tool” if he refuses to answer.

The other teacher who changed his stance on sharing personal beliefs, Bob, expressed that, “I used to think that I really shouldn’t; that the students should leave that class not knowing my political affiliation or my opinions. But the older I get, I feel as though I can explain my stance on issues without indoctrinating students and still be open minded to their viewpoint and able to debate [with] them.” He explained “as long as teachers do not try to indoctrinate and to keep an open mind to all different political affiliations, I think that [it is fine].” He offered an example, “Some of my favorite students were the absolute opposite of my political opinions” and they’ve said that “they felt like they were welcomed” and “were able to give their opinions freely.”

Jim explained that this issue is very complicated, and “there is a couple of confounding factors on that” issue and “it’s tricky…and it varies by situation and context.” He mentioned age being one of the key factors, saying that he does not advocate teachers sharing these with younger kids because some “little kids worship their teachers, they think they’re infallible” and it could begin to be like “telling kids what they should believe.” But, he said, “older kids are better able to see through it” and form their own opinions regardless of their teacher’s beliefs. He continued, “It kind of depends, with
the older kids and their beliefs, opinions, and affiliations, as to what purpose it speaks or serves…so it kind of depends on why you’re doing it.” Lastly, he added “what I find teachers are most effective is in critiquing their own positions when kids take them” by playing “devil’s advocate.”

All ten students responded with similar beliefs, saying that they value, prefer, or don’t mind their teacher expressing their personal opinions at times. Ryan said that he doesn’t mind “unless they try to force it upon me or call me names…but other than that I respect other people’s views and what they have to say.” Emily shared “I think it’s valuable to know [my teacher’s beliefs] just to get a different perspective…to know what’s going on in other people’s heads. Although I think that in some cases it’s kind of inappropriate.” Wesley explained that, “We’re a country of different beliefs and opinions and I think we should be able to share those,” but he also added that “I think it could” change his or other students beliefs after exploring the possibilities. Yet another student, Fred, responded “because it’s America we are allowed to believe whatever we want and you’re allowed to have your own opinion” and that “it’s fine as long as it’s not forced upon students.” Added Cory, “If I have one belief and the teacher has another, we can have a conversation about it and build off of that.” Pete explained “I prefer it because it would keep me more interested since I could either argue with him or agree with him.” As other students did, these students preferred teachers sharing their personal opinions but acknowledged the possible side effects of it because, as Ryan stated, “sometimes it forces people to change their opinions so it could be negative.”
Six of the ten students mentioned watching videos or movies in their social studies class while no teacher or administrators discussed it. Kendra explained “everyone kind of throws in their opinion and we usually watch a video about it.”

3. Why is social studies a required class?

As part of their interview, the participating students were asked their opinions about the purpose of social studies. Five of the ten believed that learning from previous mistakes is the main reason students take a social studies class and three others believed that learning about history is. Two students mentioned both of these reasons in their responses. Three students mentioned an understanding of government as a reason why students take social studies while only one student believed that social studies is required to help students form their own opinions.

Although history is a subtopic of social studies, it is not social studies in and of itself, which many students seemed to omit from their responses. The phrase that ‘we study history so that we learn from our past mistakes’ was one of the most common responses and nearly identical to one of the social studies teachers’ responses. Fred blended this response with another, saying that we study social studies “so we further know about our past history and we won’t make the same mistakes as we made before because that’s the way to prevent future problems.” He added that we can “work off of how the Founding Fathers put in place how we should, you know, how we should live and how our country should be.”

More students responded similarly. Ryan added, “to learn about history and things like that because you know, like I said earlier, history repeats itself if you don’t learn about it.” Yet another student, Pete, said it is “to learn from our mistakes in the past and
to make sure we don’t do them again.” Other students also mentioned that learning about history is important, but for other reasons than learning about mistakes made in the past. Said Kendra, “to learn about history so we have an understanding of how our government and how the world has worked in the past.” Marshall’s response was nearly identical, stating “so that way we know how our societies have, like, changed over time.” Finally, ringing the same tone, Manny explained the reason is “so we can learn about our history and other peoples’ history to be more, to acquaint ourselves with other peoples’ beliefs and the way they do things.”

Of the ten students interviewed, eight responded with similar reasons for the purpose of social studies. One of the students who did not fit into the above categories, Cory, said that the reason students are required to take a social studies is class is, “One, so you don’t sound stupid in a conversation and two, the way they have it set up is so you can form your own political opinion from it.” The other student, Ray, explained that “my goal is to learn about the history of the United States and about wars and to get a kind of good political view on what’s going on in the world.” These students’ responses seem to more directly relate to NCSS’s rationale for studying social studies, as well as to that of some of the teachers and administrators.

4. Do students retain more knowledge from the explicit or hidden curriculum?

As part of the interview process, the participating students and teachers were asked to describe a typical day of class and what they were currently studying. In addition, they were asked to respond to questions about the hidden and the explicit curriculum. Bob explained, “Since we have block scheduling, we have longer time periods, I think all the teachers, they think about taking that big block of time and
splitting it up into smaller chunks of learning activities.” He explained further, “Some of the time is spent actually working on or completing bookwork or other study guides,” while he believes, “the worst case scenario would be to devote the entire 80 minutes to one activity” because “students tend to lose interest after a while and we just try to keep their interest by changing multiple gears during class” by mixing up the learning activities.

Another teacher, Tom, mentioned the long class periods, “with the hour and a half blocks, you have more time to spend with the students.” Therefore, “getting to know the kids, getting them relaxed in the environment” is the first thing he tries to do at the beginning of each class. Only afterwards does he “engage them in a learning activity” which allows “immediate feedback from the students” during discussions and interactive lessons.

Students’ responses largely matched those of the teachers. Manny explained that “we basically just walk in and the teacher is at the podium and basically tells us what we’re going to do today and we get into our books and we read what we’re supposed to read or we talk about what are some of our current events.” He added, “We basically either talk about that stuff or we go into our books and we leave.” Similarly, Marshall explained, “We sit down, he tells us what we’re going to do. We take some notes and then he normally has us do something we regularly do, like a section review in the textbook. Sometimes we do projects and stuff” and “we discuss” different strategies and current events.

All ten students mentioned discussions and talking about current as daily activities in their social studies classroom. Kendra explained, “We come in and have a
discussion. If there was something that was in the news or something that was a new topic…everyone kind of throws in their opinion…but sometimes we’ll do bookwork.”

Yet another, Pete, “normally we’ll start out with like a discussion question and we’ll like talk, like a debate about what’s going on in the news or something like that.” He added, “We’ll go into detail about what’s going on.” Ryan explained “we go in and we talk about history and then, usually a kid says a really stupid comment and we’re on that about five minutes and then we go back and do some bookwork and then we leave class.”

Fred was rather detailed in his response, “We start out with kind of an introduction. Like, he’ll tell us what we’re going to do and…he’ll ask us a couple questions about a certain topic and go into detail like in depth and we’ll talk about it for a while. Then we have questions at the end and he usually has us do like a worksheet” at the end or for homework.

When asked about the impact of the hidden curriculum on how teachers teach and how students learn, every participant believes that it does. Steve explained, “I would probably say that the hidden curriculum is probably more. Kids pick up on that more because that stuff tends to be more relevant and more true to what’s going on” in their lives. Fred went into one specific example, stating the hidden curriculum plays a large part in the classroom, “especially…if you put kids with other kids who get really good grades with kids who don’t get good grades because it teaches leadership skills.”

However, it could also take away from what the less intelligent student learns if the other student does all the work. Pete responded, “I think it sometimes can and at other points I don’t know.” Ryan summed up the impact of the hidden curriculum, saying, “everything in the classroom has an impact on how you learn,” and that “if your teacher like makes it
fun, then you’re going to remember it a whole lot more than if it’s just some boring speech.”

Summary

The teachers, administrators and students who participated in this study agreed that the hidden curriculum has an impact on how teachers teach and how students learn; however, some participants disagreed on how significant that impact is. Nonetheless, the hidden curriculum includes aspects of both the explicit and implicit curriculum and continuously needs to be considered and accounted for when devising or revising a school’s explicit curriculum in order to make the material relevant to students.
CHAPTER FIVE
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The participants in this study included five social studies teachers, ten students, and two administrators who all worked at or attended the same rural high school. The administrator and teacher participants were selected due to accessibility and all worked with students in grade 9-12. The students were purposively sampled among several social studies classes and were enrolled in grade 9-12. All participants agreed to a taped interview (see Appendixes A, B, and C).

The questions of this study sought to the participants’ perspectives on the impact of the hidden curriculum within the social studies in a rural high school. The research literature suggested that the hidden curriculum and its impact continues to be debated among researchers and educators and as it has been for many decades. Researchers and educators have differing opinions about the degree of the hidden curriculum’s impact, but all agree that the hidden curriculum does have some impact on how teachers teach and how student learn social studies.

Conclusions

The research literature indicated an overwhelming understanding that the hidden curriculum has an impact in the social studies classroom; however, experts disagree on the degree – or the level of significance – of that impact. All administrators, teachers, and students who participated in this study believed that the hidden curriculum plays a factor in social studies and how it is learned and discussed. Despite a range of perspectives on
how the hidden curriculum affects social studies learning, half the students and all teachers acknowledged that content was the main focus of social studies teaching and learning during class. In addition, all students and teachers acknowledged that communication, in the form of discussions, debates, group work, and/or presentations, is key to learning and understanding key concepts and content in social studies. In addition to content and discussions, all teachers and administrators acknowledged that outside sources, specifically standardized testing and/or state standards, have a significant impact on how much time is allocated to teaching certain topics and how they are taught.

The participants in this study also made it clear that respecting others’ opinions, beliefs, and political affiliations is a priority in learning and discussing social studies related topics. This suggests that teachers and students are aware of the importance of discussions but are also cognizant of the safe environment in which discussions must be held in order to protect students from being ridiculed or humiliated during class. Because participants were not asked whether teachers or students or administrators discussed these topics outside of class, this study did not assess whether humiliation was an occurrence outside of the classroom setting. Future studies might profit from focusing on the hidden curriculum outside of the classroom setting as well.

While the results of this study must be tempered by the fact that only seventeen interviews were conducted and limited to one school in southeast Ohio, this sample does represent how some students view the importance of social studies, how some teachers believe is the best way for students to learn, and how some administrators believe teachers teach and students learn best. Taken together, these open-ended responses posed in the interviews align with the concept that communication about content-oriented topics
is the best way to learn and understand social studies; however, they also suggest a refutation of what NCSS considers to be a top priority for teaching and learning social studies.

Implications

The significance of the findings in this study are limited due to the low number of participants in one school in southeast Ohio and can only represent the perspectives of participants in this school. Future studies should develop a data collection method in which a larger population can be reached at more than one school and in different regions of the state. Future studies may be improved by asking students, teachers, and administrators to differentiate the conduct amongst peers inside and outside of the social studies classroom. Future studies might also seek to address how peers and teachers treat and view each other outside of the school setting and how it affects the teaching and learning and experiences within the school setting.
TEACHER INTERVIEW

This interview is for research purposes only. You are not required to reveal your identity, participate in, or answer any of the given questions in this interview if you do not wish to do so. Interviews will be audio recorded and are greatly appreciated.

What is your opinion of the current required social studies curriculum in which your school currently uses?

In your opinion, what are the pros and cons in the current social studies curriculum?

What is one thing you would change to the social studies curriculum? Why or why not?

Are you familiar with The Howard Zinn Project or The Paulo Freire Project? If yes, briefly explain what you know about it.

If you could teach any lesson of your choosing not included in the current social studies curriculum, what would it be and why?

In addition to your required textbook, do you employ and other books into your class? If yes, which books and why?

Do you believe social studies teachers should express their personal beliefs, opinions, political affiliation, or religion to their students? Why or why not?

As a social studies teacher, what is your goal?

Do you think your students know your goal?

What do you teach your social studies students?

What do your students learn in class? Is it strictly content or something more than that?

Explain a typical day in your class.

Do you believe the hidden curriculum has an impact on how you teach and how students learn?
APPENDIX B

ADMINISTRATOR INTERVIEW

This interview is for research purposes only. You are not required to reveal your identity, participate in, or answer any of the given questions in this interview if you do not wish to do so. Interviews will be audio recorded and are greatly appreciated.

What is your opinion of the current required social studies curriculum in which your school currently uses?

In your opinion, what are the pros and cons in the current social studies curriculum?

What is one thing you would change to the social studies curriculum? Why or why not?

Are you familiar with The Howard Zinn Project or The Paulo Freire Project? If yes, briefly explain what you know about it.

Is there any outside pressure to reform or change the current social studies curriculum? If yes, what is the most common call for reform? If no, do you have any preference to change the curriculum?

If a teacher were to deviate from the social studies curriculum, what would be the consequences?

Do you believe social studies teachers should express their personal beliefs, opinions, political affiliation, or religion to their students? Why or why not?

As an administrator, what would you recommend as a social studies teacher’s goal?

What are social studies teachers mainly teaching?

Besides what students learn from the explicit curriculum, do you believe students learn anything else while they are in a social studies class?

Do you believe the hidden curriculum has an impact on how you teach and how students learn?
APPENDIX C

STUDENT INTERVIEW

This interview is for research purposes only. You are not required to reveal your identity, participate in, or answer any of the given questions in this interview if you do not wish to do so. Interviews will be audio recorded and are greatly appreciated.

As a social studies student, what is your goal?

What do you believe your social studies teacher’s goal is? If you don’t know, how would it change your learning experience if you did know?

What does your social studies teacher teach?

What is the last thing you have learned, or remember learning, in your social studies class?

Why do you believe you are required to take a social studies class?

Explain a typical day in your social studies class. (i.e. what happens?)

How would you feel if your social studies teacher revealed his/her personal beliefs, opinions, political affiliations, or religions to the class?

What is one thing you would like to learn more about in your social studies class and why?

Do you believe your social studies teacher teaches material from a neutral, biased, or unbiased way?

Do you believe the hidden curriculum has an impact on how teachers teach and how students learn?
REFERENCES


